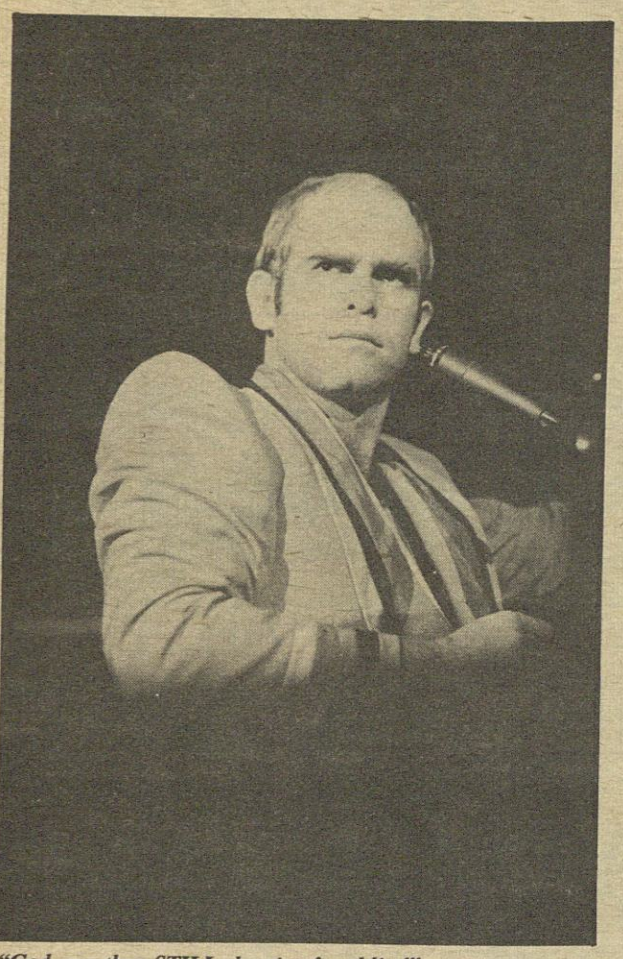
ON THE TOWN



"God, are they STILL shouting for oldies!"

'Ounce bounce' craze sweeps the provinces

Meanin' Reg is on the road—blasting into the Tupperware Belt like a human tornado . . . bringing to the lips such superlatives as "Manic energy," "Heaves a mean stool" and even "Reverent renditions." Here's ***BOB EDMANDS*** *with the full story. Pictures—****PENNIE SMITH***

Elton John

LEICESTER

ELTON JOHN has more bounce per ounce than ordinary mortals, and he bounces all those ounces arround with generous comic abandon.

He pushes back the piano stool, and does that curious high-speed strut across the stage, half Max Wall, half Disney Parade.

Then, summoning the lead guitarists into a huddle, he falls to the stage, miming frantically, before crawling towards the footlights.

A brief glare into the audience. A dash back to the piano. lifts the stool, menaces the audience with it, and smashes it to the ground.

If The Who did it with guitars and drums then a stool seems right for Elton John. Sure heaves a mean stool, that dude.

And, needless to say, this is no grand finale we're witnessing, no climatic burst of manic energy. What else, of course, but the very first number?

Elton John gives his all. And if it were possible he'd no doubt give his fans, his landing, his kitchen, his lounge, and his bathroom, too.

Not that this is a prestige gig.

Leicester is as prestigious as Preston, Coventry, Hanley, Wolverhampton, Taunton, Sheffield and all the other outposts on this 30-date U.K. tour. The commitment to performing seems consistent throughout

Reverent renditions of all those melodic anthems. And full-tilt attacks upon all the boogie biggies. You may wonder why he bothers. Would they notice out there, among the factories and shopping precincts, if he coasted a little?

They mightn't, and it's clear that Elton's concern goes beyond the next million. Or even the one after that.

He's still got to crack Britain. He's hardly a prophet without honour in his own land. But the honour is clearly greater abroad. While the last two albums went straight to number one in the States, here they were less hot.

On the strength of this one gig, chosen at random, it seems that the tour should clinch his place on the plynth. It was ominous, though, the way they cheered so hard when he said: "We're gonna do a lot of old numbers, tonight."

For Murray Head, such a cheer seems a long way off. But very much nearer than it might have been three weeks ago. Head was the former star of *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, a former performer in *Hair*, the former Judas on the original *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

In fact, he was mainly former. But he had an album out which Elton John happened to hear, and the rest was a bit like winning the pools.

Head put together a road band in no time flat and now, six dates into his first ever tour anywhere, he is suddenly no longer formerly anything. A crowd there to see Elton John applauded with more feeling than a support band could normally expect.

The biggest songs are Head's own plaintive "Say It Ain't So" and the glossy oldie "Someone's Rocking The Dreamboat".

Head says "The first time I heard more than one person clapping, I was so knocked out, I stepped back and fell over a guitar."

He seems permanently high on disbelief, given to bursts of loud laughter and cries of, "Ace, man".

"You need all the gall in the world to support Elton," he says. "It's outrageous, it's so unbelievable, I can hardly take it seriously!"

He sings in a high, full falsetto and leaps about the stage in a Cisco Kid outfit, minus the hat.

His songs are melodic and precise, and perhaps need a little more honing for the concert hall. A star is not yet quite born, but it would be safe to lay down the champagne.

The biggest, bouncing baby of them all is meanwhile poised backstage for his entrance.

Dressed almost conservatively in a red jacket, blue pants and kipper tie, Elton trundles on with something uncannily close to humility, a dangerous trait which he'll have to watch.

"Evening, Leicester," he says, after the last chords of the opener, "Grow Some Funk". "I sound like Wilfred Pickles, don't I?"

A gigantic roar is the response. It's the response to the entire act. The audience starts at no more slack a pitch than Elton.

Naturally, the hits keep a coming, like Felix the Cat. (If you've never heard of Felix the Cat, you better hang up your demob suit. In fact, take it off anyway. You look a dick in it).

Yeah, there they go: "Yellow Brick Road," "Island Girl", "Rocket Man", "Bennie And The Jets". You know, the old crowd.

Needless to say, with all those musicians and all that technology, it sounds just like the records, albeit with added volume and energy. And Elton is not one to bury his glorious past in a quickfire medley. No sirree. Each artefact is laid out for your pleasure in its entire entirety, with a bushel of licks tagged on the end for emphasis.

And when you hear what is only part of the John-Taupin catalogue, you realise the strength of Elton's claim to cosmic status. Almost every one of those Greatest Hits has infiltrated the folk memory in the way The Beatles stuff used to.

Each is as familiar a part of your surroundings as the TV set, the cat, the pine table, the deep-freeze, the mother-in-law.

You've sung Elton's songs in the bath, unless you're one of those perverse pointy heads who can whistle old Soft Machine solos.

And here they are again (Elton's songs, that is) present and correct and ready for inspection. The problem, though, is that they can seem a little too familiar. Who wants to go out for the evening to see the TV set, the cat, the pine table, the deep freeze, the mother-in-law?

Perhaps with such dangers in mind Sergeant Fantastic features assorted lesser known items in the repertoire — among them, the excellent "Levon", the aforementioned "Grow Some Funk", and an amiable "Dixie Lily" from "Carribou."

It is not till later that Davy Johnstone, the well-known towering inferno, gets to do his mandolin spot.

It is not an epic mandolin spot by any means. The mandolin is not the epic kind of instrument, but it does serve to draw attention to Mr. Johnstone.

Despite being constructed like a giant walking guitar neck, the man spends his time onstage unobtrusively pumping out those high-grade, terse solos. Each time he and Caleb Quaye start trading licks, the set catches fire all over again.

As for Ray Cooper, the Busby Berkley of the tambourine he is almost a show

■ *Continues over page.*

Gymnastics with MADELINE BELL

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